

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 TEL AV 07298 181731Z

51

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C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 7298

E.O. 11652: GDS

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SUBJECT : IMPLICATIONS OF HISTADRUT ELECTIONS RESULTS

REF: TEL AVIV 7014, 7181

1. SUMMARY. MAJOR DEVELOPMENT FOLLOWING SEPT. 11 HISTADRUT ELECTION IS EFFORT OF GENERAL SECRETARY YITZHAK BEN-AHARON TO CONTINUE IN OFFICE. MEANWHILE ANALYSIS OF ELECTION RETURNS FAILS TO PROVIDE CLEAR-CUT EVIDENCE OF SHIFTS IN VOTING PATTERNS WHICH MIGHT HAVE SIGNIFICANT BEARING ON KNESSET ELECTION OUTCOME. END SUMMARY.

2. IN SERIES OF MANEUVERS FOLLOWING SEPT. 11 HISTADRUT ELECTION, GENERAL SECRETARY BEN-AHARON HAS SOUGHT TO CONVERT DEFEAT INTO VICTORY. AFTER LABOR PARTY REFUSED TO DESIGNATE HIM AS NEXT GENERAL SECRETARY PRIOR TO ELECTIONS, BEN-AHARON MADE HISTADRUT ELECTION TEST OF HIS PERSONAL POPULARITY IN CALCULATED PLOY TO COMPEL LABOR PARTY LEADERSHIP TO ACCEDE TO POPULAR WILL. WHEN SHARE OF LABOR PARTY-MAPAM ALIGNMENT VOTE IN HISTADRUT ELECTION DROPPED NEARLY FOUR PERCENT (FROM 62.11 PERCENT IN 1969 TO 58.35 PERCENT IN 1973), BEN-AHARON IMMEDIATELY INDICATED INTENTION TO RESIGN. SUPPORTERS IN AHDUT AVODAH FACTION OF LABOR PARTY, MAPAM AND DELEGATIONS FROM WORKERS COMMITTEES OVER PAST WEEKEND EVIDENTLY CONVINCED BEN-
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PAGE 02 TEL AV 07298 181731Z

AHARON TO WITHHOLD HIS ANNOUNCEMENT OF RESIGNATION.

3. WHILE LABOR PARTY LEADERS PUBLICLY DECLARED ALIGNMENT LOSSES WERE RESPONSIBILITY OF PARTY AND NOT PERSONAL FAILURE OF BEN-AHARON, THEY HAVE TAKEN POSITION THAT DECISION ON SELECTION OF NEXT HISTADRUT GENERAL SECRETARY SHOULD BE MADE AS ORIGINALLY SCHEDULED FOLLOWING KNESSET ELECTION. BEN-AHARON STATED SEPT. 16 HE WOULD CONTINUE IN OFFICE ONLY IF LABOR PARTY DECIDES NOW, AND ASSURES HIM GREATER AUTHORITY IN SELECTING MEMBERSHIP OF IMPORTANT CENTRAL BUREAU WHICH ADMINISTERS HISTADRUT AFFAIRS.

4. AT STAKE ARE TWO KEY CONSIDERATION: (1) WHETHER HISTADRUT WILL CONTINUE TO BE LED BY CONTROVERSIAL PERSONALITY WHO, DESPITE POPULARITY AMONG WORKERS, IS OUTSPOKEN CRITIC OF GOVERNMENT POLICIES, OR WHETHER LABOR PARTY WILL SEEK NEW GENERAL SECRETARY MORE COOPERATIVE AND COMPATIBLE WITH TOP PARTY LEADERSHIP, AND (2) WHETHER FAILURE OF LABOR PARTY TO CONCEDE TO BEN-AHARON WILL (A) FURTHER EXACERBATE INTERNAL CONFLICTS IN ALIGNMENT BETWEEN EX-MAPAI AND VARIOUS FACTIONS SUPPORT BEN-AHARON AND (B) EVOKE SUFFICIENTLY STRONG POPULAR PROTEST WHICH MIGHT WEAKEN ALIGNMENT PROSPECTS IN KNESSET ELECTION. TOP LABOR PARTY LEADERS OVER NEXT FEW DAYS NO DOUBT WILL BE WEIGHING ELECTORAL PROSPECTS IN FACE OF BEN-AHARON THREAT TO RESIGN, WHILE POLITICAL SUPPORTERS IN ALIGNMENT WILL CONTINUE EFFORTS TO PROMOTE HIS CANDIDACY.

5. SPATE OF COMMENTARY ON HISTADRUT ELECTIONS HAS PRODUCED LITTLE COMPELLING EVIDENCE BEARING ON PROSPECTS FOR KNESSET ELECTION. ROUNDUP OF SOME MAIN CONCLUSIONS SUMMARIZED BELOW:

A) SOME OBSERVERS SEE DROP IN ALIGNMENT VOTE, DESPITE RELATIVELY HIGH VOTER TURNOUT (68 PERCENT IN 1973 VS. 65 PERCENT IN 1969), AS PORTENDING DROP IN KNESSET ELECTION LEADING TO LOSS OF THREE TO FOUR SEATS. ON OTHER HAND, ALIGNMENT TALLY WHEN COMPARED WITH PREVIOUS HISTADRUT ELECTION SHOWS ALIGNMENT LOST LESS VOTES IN 1973 THAN IN 1969, AND CURRENT LOSS DID NOT ACCRUE TO RIGHTWING LIKUD OR TO EXTREME LEFTWING POLITICAL GROUPS BUT TO CENTER PARTIES.

B) WITH LIKUD MORE UNITED FOR KNESSET ELECTION AND IN BETTER CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 TEL AV 07298 181731Z

POSITION TO LAUNCH MORE EFFECTIVE ELECTION CAMPAIGN, SOME SAY ITS ELECTORAL PROSPECTS MAY BE SOMEWHAT IMPROVED. (NOTE: IN LATEST TALLY OF HISTADRUT ELECTIONS (STILL NOT FINAL), LIKUD SCORED 22.69 PERCENT OF VOTE, IDENTICAL WITH VOTES WON IN 1969 BY LIKUD PARTNERS--GAHAL, STATE LIST, FREE CENTER. THIS WAS ACHIEVED DESPITE DISARRAY OF LIKUD ON EVEN OF HISTADRUT ELECTION.)

C. WHILE NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY LEADERS MAY FIND ENCOURAGEMENT IN GAINS SCORED BY RELIGIOUS WORKERS IN HISTADRUT ELECTION (FROM 3.06 PERCENT IN 1969 TO 4.27 PERCENT IN 1973) MOST

OBSERVERS NOTE RELIGIOUS WORKERS ARE ALLIED WITH ALIGNMENT IN HISTADRUT AND MEMBERSHIP TRADITIONALLY VOTES LABOR.

D) WHILE STILL A MARGINAL GROUP, BLACK PANTHERS, RUNNING FOR FIRST TIME IN HISTADRUT, WON 1.63 PERCENT OF VOTE, WITH MANY FEELING THAT BLACK PANTHERS MAY SERVE AS RALLYING POINT FOR DISADVANTAGED POOR--MAINLY MOROCCANS--WHO ARE NOT HISTADRUT VOTERS, WITH GOOD POSSIBILITY OF SECURITY REPRESENTATION IN KNESSET (ONE OR TWO SEATS). AS FOR OTHER MAJOR LEFTWING POLITICAL GROUPS (RAKAH, MERI, MOKED), THEY COLLECTIVELY WON ABOUT SAME SUPPORT IN 1973 (4.86 PERCENT) AS IN 1969 (4.77 PERCENT).

6. ON BASIS HISTADRUT RETURNS, EMBASSY AT THIS POINT SEES NO BASIS FOR REVISING EARLIER RANGE OF ESTIMATES OF KNESSET ELECTION PROSPECTS (TEL AVIV 7014). IN VIEW ALIGNMENT DROP IN HISTADRUT ELECTION, ALIGNMENT NO DOUBT WILL INTENSIFY EFFORTS TO IMPROVE IMAGE AND RETAIN AT LEAST PRESENT POSITION IN KNESSET (57 SEATS), WITH MAJOR INTERNAL PROBLEM OF FINDING MODUS VIVENDI WITH BEN-AHARON WHICH WILL SECURE ACTIVE SUPPORT OF HIS FOLLOWERS.
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